



# Education

## Rates of gender exclusion

Enoch Randy Aikins and Jakkie Cilliers

Last updated 06 June 2024 using IFs 7.84

## Rates of gender exclusion

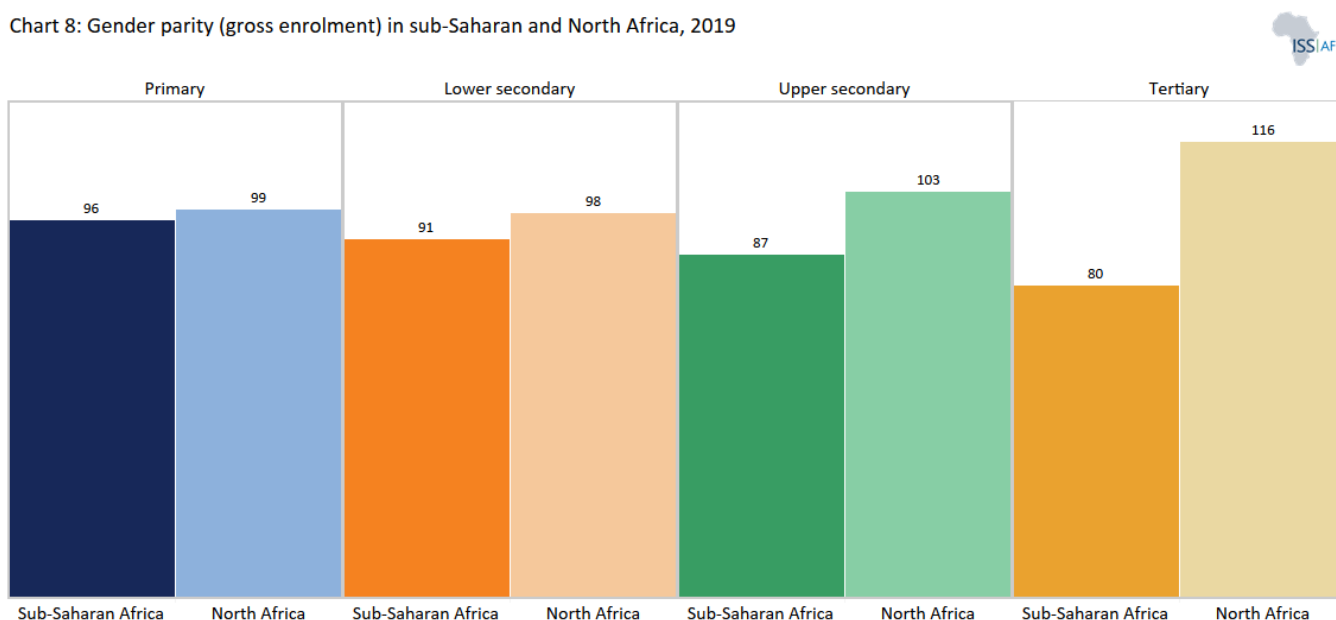
Changing gender parity in education<sup>[1]</sup> is another important priority for improved education. In sub-Saharan Africa, gender parity in education has improved over time but still trails regions such as North Africa, notwithstanding the bad reputation of the latter when it comes to the rights of girls and women. It is estimated that 9 million girls in Africa between the ages of 6 and 11 years never go to [school](#), as opposed to 6 million boys in the same age category.

Chart 8 provides a snapshot of the male-to-female ratio in education in 2019. At the primary level, 96 girls were enrolled in school for every 100 boys in sub-Saharan Africa compared to almost 99 girls to 100 boys in North Africa in the same period. In sub-Saharan Africa, Central Africa performs significantly worse than other regions at enrolling girls in primary school (93 girls to 100 boys), whereas Southern Africa does best at 99 girls to 100 boys.

The situation is the same at lower secondary levels. In 2019, there were only 91 girls enrolled in lower secondary school for every 100 boys in sub-Saharan Africa as opposed to 98 girls for every 100 boys in North Africa. This performance is boosted by the high female enrolment rate at this level in East Africa, averaging 97 girls enrolled for every 100 boys. Central Africa lags behind significantly in closing the gender gap at this level with only 77 girls enrolled for every 100 boys in the region.

The ratio worsens notably at higher levels of education. At upper secondary level, there are only 87 girls for every 100 boys in sub-Saharan Africa compared to 103 girls to 100 boys in North Africa in 2019. Again, Central Africa is the worst performer in the region with only 68 girls enrolled for every 100 boys, while Southern Africa tops the region with almost 101 girls to 100 boys in 2019. At tertiary level, there are 80 female students for every 100 male students as compared to 116 female students for every 100 male students in North Africa. Southern Africa was the only region in sub-Saharan Africa with female enrolment at the tertiary level higher than males (119 females to 100 males).

Chart 8: Gender parity (gross enrolment) in sub-Saharan and North Africa, 2019

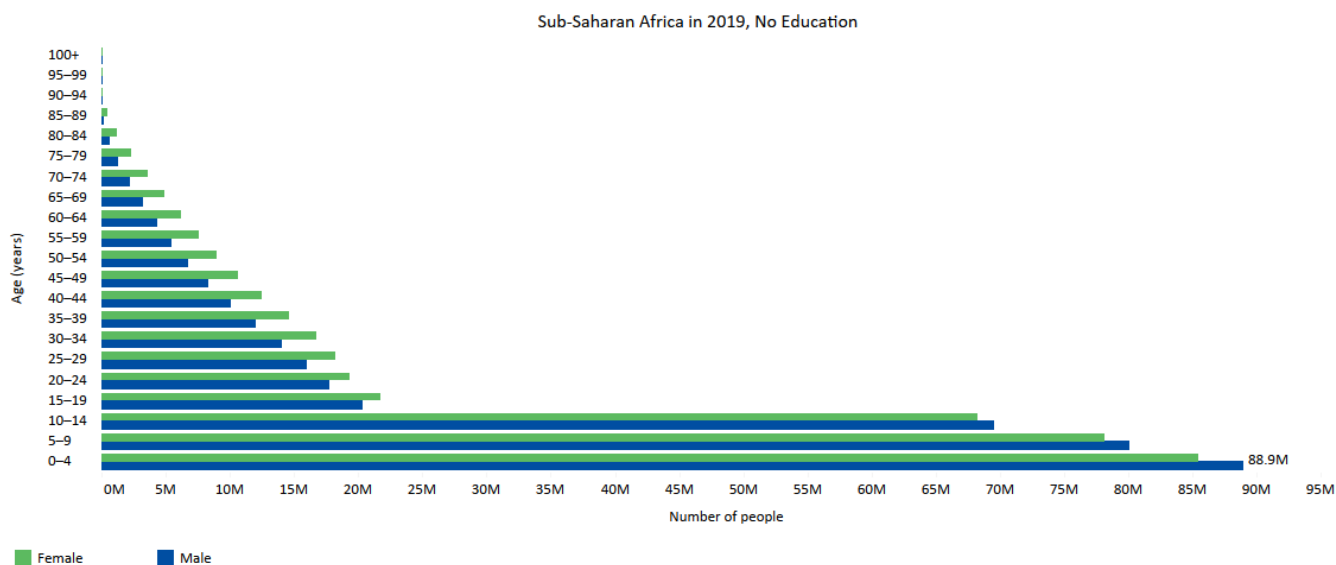


Source: IFs 7.84 initialising from UNPD medium term forecast and Barro-Lee educational attainment data

In 2019, the average woman of 25 years or older in sub-Saharan Africa received about 1.5 years less education than men in the same age group (see Chart 9 and 10). The gap is slightly lower (0.6 years) when looking at the 15–24 years age cohort. In North Africa, female adults of 25 or older have more than six years of education, around 1.2 years less than their male counterparts. However, the situation is the reverse when looking at those aged 15–24 as females have about 0.5 more years of education than their male counterparts. In 2019, female adults 25 years or older had three years less

education than males in Somalia, the worst-performing country in sub-Saharan Africa. Only in Namibia, Lesotho, Gabon, Rwanda, Mali and Libya did female adults in this age group have more education than males.

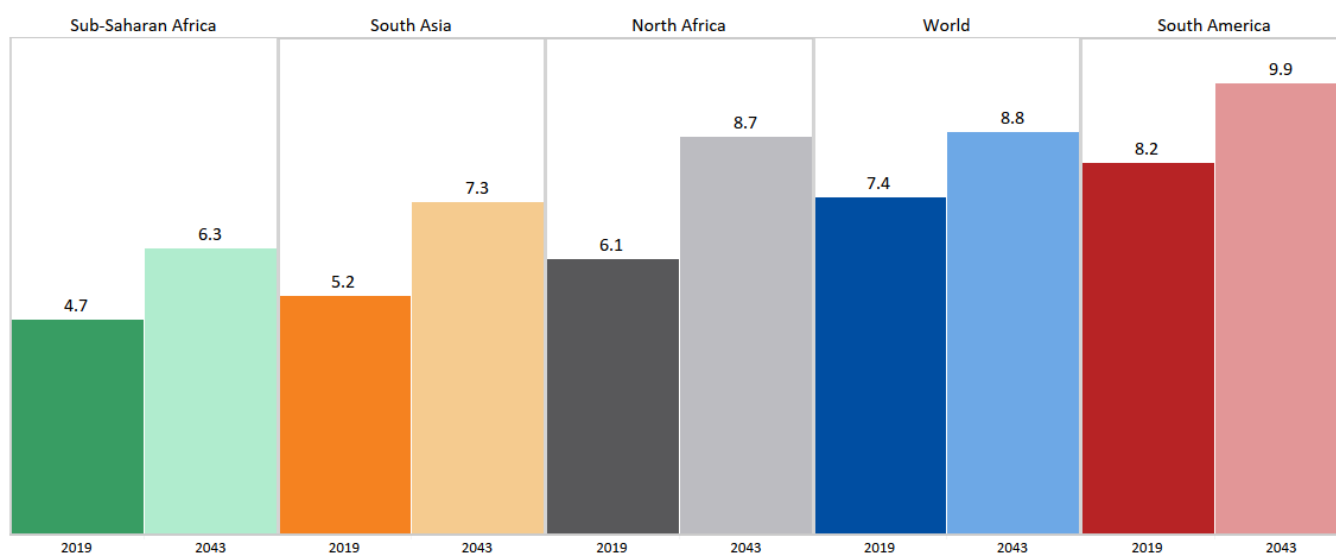
Chart 9: Gendered education attainment for North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa in 2019, 2030 and 2043



In contrast, females 25 years or older in South America had, on average, slightly more education than their male counterparts, whereas in East Asia, Central Asia and Europe the gap between the mean years for males' and females' levels of education varies between about 0.06 and 0.93 years. Although females still get less education than males in these regions, levels are rapidly approaching equality. Only in South Asia do females face higher barriers to educational attainment than in sub-Saharan Africa (with a gap of 2.4 years between the mean for males and females in 2019), although South Asia will likely outperform sub-Saharan Africa in this respect by 2043. Given the link between female education and fertility, this difference explains, to a large degree, Africa's high fertility rates (see the theme on demographics).

Improving levels of educational attainment is a slow process. For instance, it took sub-Saharan Africa a decade (from 2000 to 2010) to increase the average number of years of education of females by one year. The global mean length of adult female education stood at 8.4 years in 2019—a goal sub-Saharan Africa will achieve only in the second half of this century on the Current Path, at which point the global average will likely have increased to about 10 years. Although Africa is improving, there is no indication of the continent closing this gap with the rest of the world in the Current Path forecast without aggressive interventions.

Chart 10: Current Path forecast of mean years of education among adults women 25 years and older, 2019 and 2043



Source: IFs 7.84 initialising from UNPD medium term forecast and Barro-Lee educational attainment data

## Endnotes

1. Gender parity refers to the number of female students participating in a given level of education relative to the number of male students at the same level.

## Donors and sponsors



### Reuse our work

- All visualizations, data, and text produced by African Futures are completely open access under the [Creative Commons BY license](#). You have the permission to use, distribute, and reproduce these in any medium, provided the source and authors are credited.
- The data produced by third parties and made available by African Futures is subject to the license terms from the original third-party authors. We will always indicate the original source of the data in our documentation, so you should always check the license of any such third-party data before use and redistribution.
- All of our charts [can be embedded](#) in any site.

### Cite this research

Enoch Randy Aikins and Jakkie Cilliers (2025) Education. Published online at [futures.issafrica.org](https://futures.issafrica.org). Retrieved from <https://futures.issafrica.org/thematic/06-education/> [Online Resource] Updated 06 June 2024.

## About the authors

**Mr Enoch Randy Aikins** joined the AFI in May 2021 as a Researcher. Before that, Enoch was a research and programmes officer at the Institute for Democratic Governance in Accra in charge of local governance reforms, poverty and inequality and public sector reforms. He also worked as a research assistant (economic division) with the Institute for Statistical Social and Economic Research at the University of Ghana. Enoch's interests include African politics and governance, economic development, public sector reform, poverty and inequality. Enoch is a Young African Fellow at the School of Transnational Governance, European University Institute in Florence and has an MPhil in economics from the University of Ghana, Legon.

**Dr Jakkie Cilliers** is the ISS's founder and former executive director. He currently serves as chair of the ISS Board of Trustees, head of the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme at the Pretoria office of the Institute, and is an extraordinary professor at the University of Pretoria. His 2017 best-seller *Fate of the Nation* addresses South Africa's futures from political, economic and social perspectives. His three most recent books, [Africa First! Igniting a Growth Revolution](#) (March 2020), [The Future of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities](#) (April 2021), and [Africa Tomorrow: Pathways to Prosperity](#) (June 2022) take a rigorous look at the continent as a whole.

## About African Futures & Innovation

Scenarios and forecasting can help Africa identify and respond to opportunities and threats. The work of the African Futures & Innovation (AFI) program at the Institute for Security Studies aims to understand and address a widening gap between indices of wellbeing in Africa and elsewhere in the world. The AFI helps stakeholders understand likely future developments. Research findings and their policy implications are widely disseminated, often in collaboration with in-country partners. Forecasting tools inspire debate and provide insights into possible trajectories that inform planning, prioritisation and effective resource allocation. Africa's future depends on today's choices and actions by governments and their non-governmental and international partners. The AFI provides empirical data that informs short- and medium-term decisions with long-term implications. The AFI enhances Africa's capacity to prepare for and respond to future challenges. The program is headed by Dr Jakkie Cilliers.